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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NDJAMENA 000136

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SUBJECT: UMMA PARTY ATTEMPTS TO RECONCILE CHAD, SUDAN

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) Ahead of Sadiq al Mahdi's upcoming visit to Chad, Sudan's opposition Umma Party is attempting to broker an agreement between Sudan and Chad for both governments to cease their support for rebel groups. A member of Al Mahdi's advance party confirmed rumors that Umma is in "serious talks" with the ruling NCP to resolve the Darfur conflict by meeting some of the rebels' demands and then to establish a power sharing arrangement between itself, the NCP, and other opposition parties ahead of the Sudanese elections scheduled for 2009. These developments give some credence to Darfurians' fears that they will be excluded from securing their own voice in political life because of back-room machinations. End summary.

Striving for Chad, Sudan Agreement

¶2. (SBU) As part of broader discussions with Sudan's ruling National Congress Party (NCP), Sadiq Al Mahdi's opposition Umma Party is attempting to broker an agreement between Sudan and Chad for both governments to cease their support for rebel groups in each country, Umma's chairman for Darfur told Poloff on April 1. Confirming rumors circulating in Khartoum in recent weeks, Ismail Khitir Abdelkarim said that Umma is in "serious talks" with the NCP to resolve the Darfur conflict, claiming that the Sudanese Government realizes that it is losing control of events and does not want to risk the country's break-up. "Time is not with them," said Abdelkarim, "and Umma's priority is for Sudan to remain united."

¶3. (SBU) Abdelkarim traveled to N'djamena with an Umma party delegation to advance Al Mahdi's upcoming visit, scheduled for April 12. The delegation met with President Idriss Deby, who Abdelkarim characterized as responsive to Umma's plan to find a "common position" between Chad and Sudan and to establish a monitoring mechanism to verify the cessation of Chad and Sudan's support for rebel groups operating on both sides of the border. Al Mahdi expects to table a written proposal when he arrives in N'djamena. Recognizing that the Chadian rebels will continue their attempts to overthrow Deby's government unless it shares power, Abdelkarim said that Deby agreed to direct negotiations with the Chadian rebels to prevent the outbreak of war.

Meeting Darfurians' Demands

¶4. (SBU) The primary obstacle to a political settlement in Darfur remains the fragmentation of the rebel movements, said Abdelkarim.

The solution, he proposed, is to demonstrate that the NCP is willing to compromise on Darfurians' key demands: unifying the three Darfur states into a single region, creating a vice presidency slot for a Darfurian in the national government, and specifying amounts for compensation. Umma is working as an interlocutor between Sudan and the rebel movements to build consensus on these issues as a precursor to negotiations. Umma then plans to convene a conference of the rebels and the NCP to "sit as Sudanese" and work out agreements on the details of power and wealth sharing.

Delaying Census, Elections

¶5. (SBU) Abdelkarim stated that the elections cannot happen in Darfur--or in the rest of Sudan--until Darfur's "political problems" are resolved and suggested that both the census and elections be delayed. "If not, the Darfur rebels will never stop and new factions will keep emerging because there is no political deal," he stated. "We must tackle the relationship between the center and Darfur for elections to happen." With regard to the census specifically, Abdelkarim predicted its results will be "unfair and illegitimate."

Dividing Power Between NCP, UMMA, PCP

¶6. (SBU) After neutralizing the Darfur rebel movements by meeting some of their demands, Umma's goal is to conclude an agreement that divides political power in Darfur among itself, the NCP, and Hassan al Turabi's Popular Congress Party (PCP). Asked what Sudan's interest is in concluding an agreement with the rebels or with the opposition parties, Abdelkarim claimed that the NCP is growing weaker and wants to shore up its own position by stabilizing the country. Though power-sharing agreements with the opposition parties will lessen some of its influence, they will ensure that the

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NCP still holds sway throughout the country, which it will otherwise lose through competitive elections.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) Umma has lost most popular support in Darfur, its traditional foothold in Sudan. Given that Abdelkarim's assessment of the NCP's weakness and its willingness to meet Darfurians' demands is overstated, Umma's attempts to broker peace between Chad and Sudan as well as between Sudan and the rebel movements is both an attempt to regain the party's base in the region and to ensure itself an influential position irrespective of the 2009 elections. Abdelkarim's admission that discussions between Umma and the NCP are ongoing confirms Darfurians' fears that they will be excluded from securing their own voice in political life because of back-room machinations and underscores their lack of confidence in the elections. As one key Darfur rebel leader told Poloff ironically during a recent conversation, cooperation between Umma and the NCP will mean that Darfur has "only one enemy instead of many." End comment.

¶8. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.

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